Women’s Leadership Programs
at the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center
University of Oklahoma

2019 NEWSLETTER

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The 2019 N.E.W. Leadership class was made up of 35 promising women leaders who represented 18 colleges and universities. This intensive, five-day, non-partisan leadership program is designed to educate, inspire, and empower future women political leaders and remove the barriers faced by women in public life. Projects throughout the five days included a four-hour campaign simulation, a skit about historic and contemporary women leaders, and an in-depth action project where attendees researched and presented policy arguments regarding pay transparency. Each year the program fosters open dialogue, learning, and connection to resources that leads to lifelong friendships and connections between the participants, speakers, and faculty-in-residence.

Our three faculty-in-residence this year were AJ Griffin, who is a former Oklahoma State Senator and the current director of government affairs at Paycom, Councilwoman Nikki Nice of Oklahoma City Ward 7, and Jacintha Webster, staff attorney at the Oklahoma House of Representatives. They, plus the more than fifty other women leaders, shared their life and career experiences, while providing advice and encouragement to the participants.

N.E.W. Leadership remains the signature program of the Carl Albert Center’s Women’s Leadership Programs. This year’s program was held May 17-21 in Norman. The program closed with the fifth annual EmPower Lunch where sponsors and donors of the program were recognized for their generosity and attendees heard directly from representatives of the 2019 N.E.W. Leadership class about their experience with the program.

ALUMNAE SPOTLIGHT

Whitney Cipolla (2017) is in her second year of the Master of Public Administration program at OU-Tulsa. She just started as a graduate assistant after teaching 6th grade ELA for the past two years with Teach for America. She was recently accepted into the Women’s Political Leadership Program through a nonprofit called Leaders for Educational Equity, which works to get leaders with classroom experience to engage civically and politically.

Lauren Crudup (2015) graduated from the University of Arkansas School of Law in May, took the July 2019 Oklahoma Bar exam, and accepted an associate attorney position with Lee Coats Law in Vinita, Oklahoma.

Jasha Lyons Echo-Hawk (2017) made a bid for Oklahoma State House District 35 in 2018. She completed a Community Doula course and Doulas of North America International training to become a certified birth doula. In 2019, she was recognized by the Journal Record as an Achiever Under 40 and by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED) annual Native American 40 Under 40 Award. She currently works as the resource development coordinator for the Pawnee Seed Preservation Project.

Taylor Finley (2018) works as a legislative correspondent for U.S. Congressman Kevin Hern. Taylor also worked as a consulting associate for an international non-profit and government agency. Taylor was a cheerleader for the 2018 Stanley Cup Champions, Washington Capitals. She is a member of the DC Sooners alumni group and The Madison of DC, and serves as an officer for the Oklahoma State Society. Taylor was selected as the 2019 Oklahoma Cherry Blossom Princess.

Chelsey Garner (2014) has worked at Textron Aviation in Wichita, Kansas for the past three years, in various contract administration and negotiation roles. Recently, she was admitted to the Master of Science in business analytics at Arizona State University to learn technical skills required to move into a more analytical role.

Ally Glavas (2010) was promoted to vice president of Candor PR this year and earned the National Outstanding Young Professional Award from PRWeek.
The 2018 election cycle in Oklahoma resulted in seven of our alumnae being elected into public offices in the state. Including alumnae from both N.E.W. Leadership and Pipeline to Politics, these brilliant and bold women have begun their public service in a wide variety of public offices in the state, including district judge, state representative, and city council positions. The majority of our alumnae who were recently elected into office were running for the first time. To get to know these women better, we asked them to share how their experience with N.E.W. Leadership or Pipeline to Politics prepared them for their time in office and gave them the opportunity to share advice for other women who are interested in running for office.

“I came to Pipeline to Politics to see how I could make a difference beyond the advocacy I was already doing,” says State Senator Julia Kirt of District 30. She left the event with a strong desire to run for office in the future. However, she did not know then that her opportunity to run was approaching quicker than she originally thought. “My predecessor decided not to run and I was actively campaigning a few months later.” A piece of advice Senator Kirt has for women who are interested in running for office is to “build up your positive network in every way possible” by being engaged in your community in a consistent and reliable way, which shows credibility for your candidacy.

“N.E.W. Leadership played an important role in my decision-making process to run for office. It prepared me for what to expect during the campaign and to identify my weaknesses and strengths,” says Councilwoman Amanda Sandoval of Bethany Ward 1. She also emphasizes the importance of being willing to ask for help when running for office. A challenge that Councilwoman Sandoval has encountered so far as an elected official is experiencing imposter syndrome sometimes. She says that when imposter syndrome occurs, “you have to remember that you have been elected into this office for a reason.”

Oklahoma State Senator Carri Hicks of District 40 ran for office while pregnant and now has three small children, which has involved balancing the demands of her position and being present for her family. Senator Hicks believes that this experience has made her a better lawmaker, as she is “truly able to understand how families are impacted by policy at the state level.” The advice she has for women who are interested in running for office is to simply go for it and “not wait for someone to ask you to run” because your lived experiences are valuable and your voice matters.

Oklahoma State Representative Merleyn Bell of District 45 says that Pipeline to Politics taught her the importance of a strong campaign team as a candidate. As an elected official, she recognizes the importance of asserting herself and “frequently reminding others that [she] is qualified, capable, and deserves to be there.” Advice she has for women who are interested in running for office is that it is important to “understand the people you hope to represent by attending events, join-
“N.E.W. Leadership was the turning point in my life,” says Judge Kassie McCoy, the Associate District Judge in Rogers County, “Not only did it provide me with the opportunity to network with some of Oklahoma’s leading ladies who were already impacting the state, but it also provided me with the opportunity to meet a class of young women who shared the same passion.” Upon Judge McCoy’s election, she learned that she would be taking over the felony docket. “Many people did not believe a woman should or could handle this type of docket,” but she took it as a challenge and has excelled in the position.

Furthermore, two other alumnae, Oklahoma State Representative Cyndi Munson of District 85 and Judge Natalie Mai, District Judge for District 7 were also re-elected and elected, respectively. Representative Munson, our first alumna to achieve elective office, has reached new heights in her elected position as Caucus Chair for the House Democrats in December 2018. We are truly proud of each and every alumna of our programs who is serving in elected office and look forward to even more running in future elections.

PIPILINE TO POLITICS 2020

If you desire to increase your involvement in public service and community leadership and potentially run for office, you should attend the one-day Pipeline to Politics program, which will take place in January 2020. Pipeline to Politics is the product of an ongoing partnership between Women’s Leadership Programs (WLP) and the Oklahoma Women’s Coalition (OWC) and is designed for professional women and community volunteers. Attendees will be equipped with practical ways to impact their communities and steps involved in running for office, all within the convenient format of the one-day event.

WLP has sponsored this program six times prior to teaming up with the OWC in 2016 to jointly present the program. The program will take place in the Oklahoma City metro area in 2020. More information will soon be available on our website (ou.edu/wlp), the OWC website (okwc.org), Facebook, and Twitter.

THOUSANDS STRONG

The 2019 Thousands Strong Campaign will run from October 28th through November 26th this year and will provide support for the 2020 class of N.E.W. Leadership. Thousands Strong is OU’s crowdfunding platform, which has given us a new method of fundraising. We’ve had great success with our previous campaigns: $9,000 in 2018 and over $10,000 in both 2016 and 2017. These campaigns over the last three years have dramatically increased the number of new donors to N.E.W. Leadership, especially our alumnae.

Last year, we instituted a highly successful, friendly competition between the N.E.W. Leadership classes to encourage more to give, which we hope to repeat this year. In addition to our focus on alumnae giving, we plan to have a matching donation challenge and other incentives to boost giving. To support N.E.W. Leadership through this campaign, please donate at www.thousandsstrong.ou.edu.
Elisha Guerra (2019) received the 2019 Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholar award based on her GPA for Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. She will also be running for president of the PTK Honor Society at Connors State College.

Mandy Heaps (2002) currently serves as president for the Junior League of Oklahoma City.

Leslie Illston (2003) recently completed her Master of Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma in May 2019. She credits a great support network and many amazing female mentors with giving her the courage to get her degree, while also welcoming her first child into the world.

Diana Rogers Jaeger (2002) fulfilled her dream of becoming an entrepreneur when she started Love to Appreciate Consulting two years ago. She is serving as the president-elect of the Board of Directors of Girl Scouts Western Oklahoma. She also serves on the organization’s Property Taskforce Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the development of the new Urban Camp & STEM Center being constructed right across from the Oklahoma City Zoo.

Kelbie Kennedy (2009) works as a policy counsel for the National Congress of American Indians in Washington, DC, where she focuses her efforts on tribal homeland security, tribal emergency management, juvenile justice, Indian Child Welfare Act, tribal courts, and violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women policy issues.

Emily Mee (2017) was named a Pe-et top ten senior at OU, and spent the last two summers in Washington, DC working on higher education policy, advocating for the accessibility, and affordability of college for low-income, first generation students like herself.

Hope Melton (2019) worked as a program leader this summer in Spain for Westcoast Connection, a travel and education company that hosts a variety of international programs for high school students. She is now a senior at Oklahoma City University and will graduate this May with a Bachelor of Science in political science.

Madison Miller (2015) is currently serving as the policy and committee coordinator at The Petroleum Alliance of Oklahoma and recently graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma with a Bachelor of Arts in political science in August 2018.

Tamah Minnis (2017) worked for the College Board in their marketing department and Native American Internship program this summer in New York City. She was one of four selected for the Native American program and helped revise their Indigenous College Planning Guidebook, which launched in October.


Cyndi Munson (2006) was elected Caucus Chair for the House Democrats in December of 2018. She was also selected for the class of 2019 Henry Toll Fellowship, a leadership development program for government officials through the Council of State Governments.

Jaclyn Munson (2006) serves as an optometric physician at Fort Collins Family Eye Care in Fort Collins, Colorado. She is also a founding member of Colorado’s Dry Eye Society, offering advanced education in the Mountain West Region.

Arden Nerius (2018) was accepted into the Early Entry Program for the University of Oklahoma College of Law. She just started her 1L year as a senior and will be able to use those credits to finish her undergraduate studies. She also started as an executive legal intern for the deputy attorney general of legislative affairs at the Attorney General of Oklahoma’s Office.

Emma Newberry-Davis (2012) was hired as the programs manager for the Kirkpatrick Family Fund in August 2018. In that role, she helped plan the 2019 Green Box Arts Festival, which took place in Green Mountain Falls, Colorado in July.

Jonni Nigro (2017) is currently a senior nursing student at OU-Tulsa and will graduate with her Bachelor of Science in nursing in May 2020. During the summer, she completed two externships in Tulsa at Hillcrest Medical Center and OSU Medical Center.

Saidy Herrera Orellana (2019) visited schools in Guatemala and El Salvador this past June, motivating students to pursue higher education in their own towns and ideas on how to achieve those goals. She was appointed as the secretary for the planning committee working with the Guatemalan Consulate in Oklahoma City, coordinating the event and serving as emcee at the Guatemalan Independence Day on Sept. 8, 2019. In August, she was interviewed by a Spanish network, Telemundo Oklahoma, about her inspiring story of being a non-traditional and successful Latinx student at The University of Oklahoma.

Grace Olaleye (2017) will complete her Master of Science in construction science this December with a thesis on ADHD and Entrepreneurial Orientation in STEM Situations, specifically within the field of construction. She has been hired by HNTB, an infrastructure solutions firm, working in risk management.

Bailey Perkins (2011) transitioned to Washington, DC earlier this year to join Congresswoman Kendra S.
Horn’s legislative team leading education, healthcare, labor, nutrition, and science, space and technology policy issues. She also teaches as an adjunct professor for OSU-OKC where she teaches political science. She got engaged on August 19th and will be getting married to Roderick Wright during the Fall of 2021.

**Anna Przebinda (2013)** was recently promoted to legislative correspondent in Virginia U.S. Senator Tim Kaine’s Washington, DC office, where she handles a portfolio of education, LGBTQ, and women’s issues related legislation. She was also accepted to the University of Virginia’s Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership as part of their Emerging Leadership Program.

**Jacque Ruhl (2017)** was recently awarded the Newman Civic Fellowship, which recognizes civic service and leadership sponsored by Campus Compact.

**Amanda Sandoval (2014)** was elected to the Bethany City Council - Ward 1 in February of 2019.

**Kate Springer (2018)** started her second year of law school and is interning with the Department of Corrections Legal Counsel.

**Emily Stacey (2006)** is currently the Oklahoma Political Science Association Teacher of the Year (Two-Year Institutions) and completed her fourth book over cyberterrorism and the use of digital technologies in the recruitment efforts of terror organizations. She is a mentor to political science majors and loves being a professor at Rose State College.

**Elizabeth Szkirpan (2013)** continues in her exciting work as the catalog and metadata librarian at Tulsa Community College. In 2019, she was nominated to Beta Phi Mu International Honor Society, the professional society for librarians, as well as the Chair-Elect for the Technical Services Round Table (TSRT) of the Oklahoma Library Association (OLA). She was selected as a member of the OLA GOLD Leadership Institute and has been selected to present over her work with TCC’s LGBTQ+ collection at the 2019 OLA conference, TSRT workshop, and Mountains-Plains Library Association (MPLA) regional conference.

**Emma Velez (2011)** is an advanced doctoral candidate in philosophy and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies at the Pennsylvania State University. She was also named an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Dissertation Fellow for the 2019-2020 academic year.

**Emily Vickers (2015)** graduated from the University of Tulsa in May 2019 with a Bachelor of Science in environmental policy. This summer, she served as an intern at the Dept. of Energy’s Clean Cities Workforce Development Program in New York City and was recently selected to intern at Tulsa’s Clean Cities coalition at INCOG this fall. As a Clean Cities intern, her role is to build public awareness of alternative fuel and advanced vehicle technologies and encourage others to adopt practices that contribute to improvement in energy efficiency in transportation, which will help Tulsa become a leader in sustainable transportation.

**Hannah Walcher (2016)** was hired by the Edmond Police Department (EPD) this year, completed the police academy and field training program. She is now a police officer/patrolwoman for EPD.

**Betsy Waller (2016)** recently graduated with her Master of Public Health in health promotion sciences and got a job as a prevention field representative for the Prescription Drug Overdose Project at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. She will also be a team leader for the Mine in OKC, which is a social innovation and entrepreneurship program for young professionals in OKC, this upcoming fellowship year.

**Erica Wilson-Traxler (2019)** was elected the first female Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander of Post 5263 and is the 2019-2020 Student Veterans of America representative for the state of Oklahoma.

**Samantha Wolf (2016)** graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University in May 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and just started law school at Oklahoma City University. She is also an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer specializing in fundraising, grant writing, and opioid abuse prevention, and recently completed an internship with Stuart and Clover in Shawnee.

**Margo Woodward (2015)** received her Master of Arts in strategic communication in 2017 and became an adjunct professor of communication at Tulsa Community College. Additionally, she is a blogger and launched her first eBook, *Break Free & Live!* in March.

**Jenna Worthen (2008)** launched a curated online community called Mom Who Works, which offers resources and reinforcements for women navigating both motherhood and the workforce.